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Core discussion and instrumental networks as determinants of socioeconomic inclusion

Verónica de Miguel-Luken and Livia García-Faroldi

Department of State Law and Sociology, University of Málaga, Spain

vdmiguel@uma.es, lgarcia@uma.es

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Introduction

The study of poor populations has a **long history in sociology**, but the association of deprivation with the social networks has received less attention.

This paper is based in two concepts with **a long tradition research: social capital and social support**. The social capital literature has been closely related to job-market issues, while the scholarship on social support has been linked to the study of poverty and social exclusion.

In this paper, we investigate **how individual and network factors are related to poverty and social exclusion**. We use data from the **Spanish General Social Survey-2013**, a year of profound economic crisis, with high rates of unemployment (26%) and population at risk of poverty and social exclusion (22%).

Novelties of this work:

- 1) This is the **first work that uses these data** to analyse how structural factors are linked to social exclusion in Spain.
- 2) We distinguish between **inherited resources** (through parents, siblings, and other kin present from ego's birth) and **acquired resources** (all others), a distinction that is normally missing in the literature (Contreras et al., 2019).

Social Networks and Social capital

The concept of social capital has been used when considering the role of networks in explaining poverty.

The individual approach to social capital developed by **Bourdieu and Lin** focuses in inequalities among individuals in access to resources through their networks. Those who are better connected enjoy a relative advantage in virtue of their ties to other people.

There exist a second approach to social capital, developed by **Putnam**, which focuses on how social capital generates collective goods.

We focus on **the first perspective because it is closely related to social exclusion.**

According to Lin (2000), **social groups have different amounts of social capital due to two phenomena:** first, each society provides unequal socioeconomic opportunities to members of different groups (**structural process**); second, people tend to interact with others who are similar (**social homophily**).

Research on social capital has focused on:

- **Three dimensions:** the presence of alters, the resources of these alters and the availability of these resources for ego.
- **Two outcomes:** instrumental actions (gaining resources) and expressive actions (maintaining resources, such as gaining emotional support and sharing of sentiments).

Social Networks and Social capital

One of the most analysed outcomes of social capital is related to **labour market**. Job seekers are not necessarily helped by having social contacts *per se*, but by **the resources of these contacts** (the socio-economic composition of the network members).

H1. Higher average job prestige of alters is associated with the access to better jobs and, consequently, with the achievement of ego's better economic positions and lower risk of social exclusion. Although this relationship will hold for both inherited and achieved members of the core discussion network, acquired ties in a meritocratic society are expected to be more relevant.

The causality between social capital and labour market outcomes could be questioned. We use variables related to “**inherited capital**” which help disentangle this causality.

Granovetter's theory of the strength of weak ties (1973) states that weak ties provided an important flow of information in contrast to redundant information facilitated by strong ties. This theory and later empirical research have pointed to the beneficial impact of weak ties on labour market outputs. On the other hand, **Burt's redundancy definition** is identical to ego network density (when ties to ego are not taken into account) (Borgatti, 1997).

H2. Merging both ideas, we expect that strong ties density has a negative influence on income and social inclusion.

Social Support and Social Exclusion

One of the benefits of social capital is the achievement of **social support**, that is, “emotional, informational, or practical assistance from significant others” (Thoits, 2010, p. S46).

A large body of research has shown that **poor people use extensive networks** of kin and other close relationships. Nevertheless, **kin** are not always available or even they are not asked for help, although this reduced presence of family is compensated to some extent by the provider role of **friends or acquaintances**. Some scholars have warned about the “**myth of survival**” (González de la Rocha, 2007) because some findings based on large-scale surveys have shown that poor people who most need informal support are **the least likely to have it** (Böhnke, 2008).

Empirical evidence has also shown **mixed results** about the association between poverty and social support networks.

- 1) Some **quantitative studies** did not find that networks of the poor were reduced. **Other variables** explained patterns of sociability (health, ethnicity, labour market status)
- 2) Some **qualitative studies** have focused on how entry into poverty means **a reduction or change in social support networks**. Furthermore, these **networks are smaller** and their members **comprise low-income individuals**.
- 3) Some researchers showed that poor individuals developed and maintained elaborate **exchange networks consisting primarily of strong ties** (Stack, 1974, Adler de Lomnitz, 1977).

Social Support and Social Exclusion

We can distinguish two competing hypotheses regarding the association between poverty and social integration (Böhnke, Böhnke and Link, 2017):

- The **thesis of compensation** assumes that solidarity will increase and networks will become more tightly knit in the event of material disadvantage.
- The **thesis of accumulation** expects that economic disadvantage results in a weaker social network where social contacts are focused on the family.

*H3. Thus, **network size is important**. The larger the expressive and instrumental networks, the broader the options people have to rely on others, to obtain assistance from them and to escape poverty.*

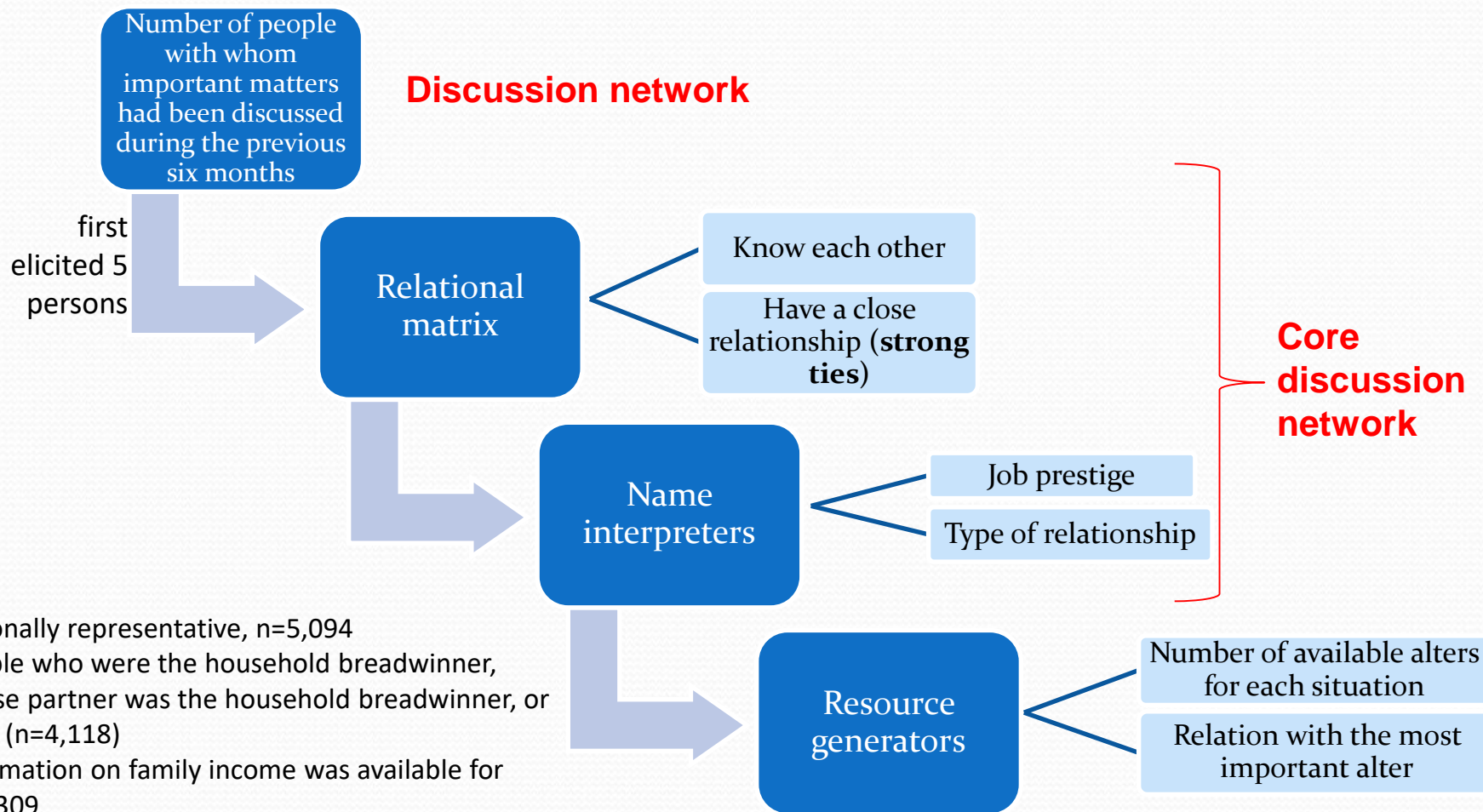
*(A) Particularly, with regards to **instrumental support**, larger networks are expected to be related to better achievement.*

*(B) Regarding **discussion networks**, even if the relationship is expected to be similar to that for the instrumental support (the bigger the better), given the universal provider role associated to kin in a familistic society like Spain, the differences in ego's economic and social advantage will be **mainly due to the size of non-kin** core discussion network.*

The causal ordering in the link between personal disadvantages and personal safety nets is unresolved (Harknett and Hartnett, 2011). Theory and prior research suggested that relationships were usually **bidirectional and self-reinforcing**. We analyse the impact of social exclusion on other aspects of exclusion, the economic situation being the most important one.

Spain has a Mediterranean welfare system in which the family assumes the primary caregiver role and social policies are limited. It ranks as one of the European countries with highest inequality. Thus, **it is expected that social capital is unevenly distributed among the Spanish population and that less advantaged groups lack both emotional and instrumental social support.**

Data: Spanish General Social Survey (SGSS)-2013



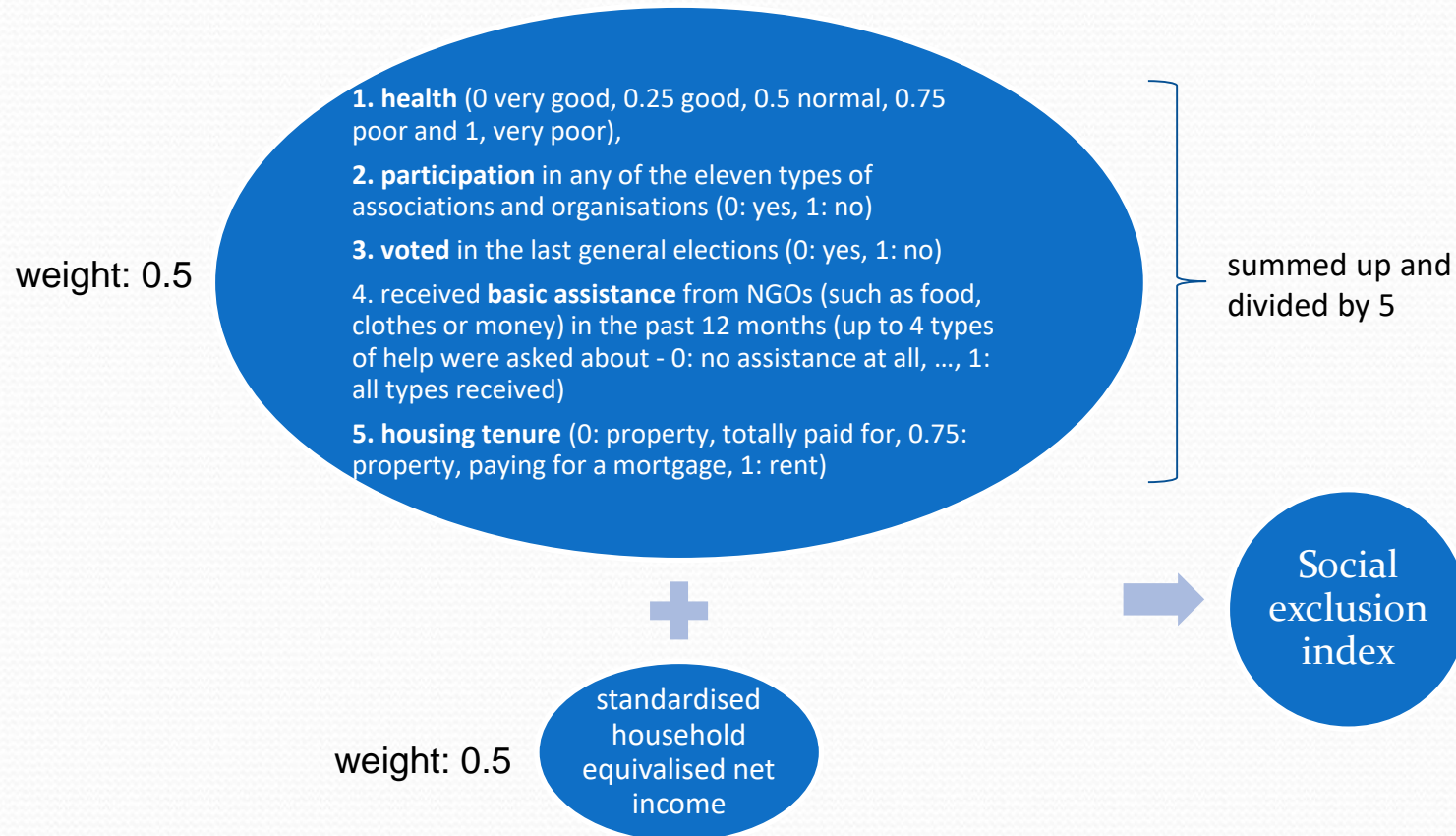
Dependent variables (I)

- 1) *Household equivalised net income*
- 2) *Household equivalised net income adjusted by housing expenditures*

The two variables were equivalised according to household composition and members were made equivalent by weighting each according to their age: 1 for the first adult, 0.5 for the remaining adults and cohabitants over 13, and 0.3 for each child under 14

Results were standardised (Min-Max normalisation)

Dependent variables (II)



robustness analysis was carried out

Independent variables

- Discussion network size
- Core discussion network size: kin / non - kin
- Instrumental network size: potential available help to take care of the children, potential available alters to ask for economic help and potential alters who would accompany ego to the doctor or to the hospital.
- Network composition: average alters' prestige
- Strong-ties density
- Control variables
 - sex
 - place of birth (Spain, abroad)
 - age-group
 - academic attainment
 - employment status
 - living with a partner
 - number of children under 16 at home
 - degree of urbanisation
 - interpersonal trust
 - conscientiousness

Results (I)

Table 1. Linear regression beta coefficients for the variables about discussion network's size and structure

	discussion network size	core discussion network size: kin non-kin	density strong ties among alters
household equivalised net income	0.038*	0.020 0.042*	-0.029+
household equivalised net income adjusted by housing expenditures	0.039*	0.021 0.050**	-0.023
Social exclusion	-0.058**	-0.038* -0.098***	0.039*

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.10$

Note: Models are controlled for sex, age group, nativity, academic level, labour situation, partnership, number of children <16 in the household, degree of urbanisation, psychological features and size of instrumental networks.

Results (II)

Table 2. Linear regression models (beta coefficients)

	Model 1 family equivalised net income	Model 2 household equivalised net income adjusted by housing expenditures	Model 3 social exclusion
core discussion network size			
kin	0.004	0.004	-.014
non-kin	0.016	0.022	-.069**
instrumental network size			
child care	-0.069**	-0.088***	.057*
economic help	0.049**	0.053**	-.055**
accompany to the doctor	0.036+	0.045*	-.057**
network composition			
mean prestige inherited	0.050**	0.040*	-.018
mean prestige achieved	0.119***	0.136***	-.133***
observations (n)	2,292	2,116	2,090
R-squared	0.487	0.457	0.459

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10

Note: Models are controlled for sex, age group, nativity, academic level, labour situation, partnership, number of children <16 in the household, degree of urbanisation, psychological features and size of instrumental networks.

Conclusions

- Individual factors (not included in the tables) are more determinant predictors than network factors.
- Having a larger instrumental network (measured in terms of economic help or company to the doctor) is positively related to higher income and less social exclusion. Having a large network for child care has the opposite effect (H3A partially confirmed).
- The size of the discussion network is only significant (the larger the network, the better) when alters' prestige is not taken into account (H3B partially confirmed).
- Instrumental support more relevant than expressive support.
- Non-kin expressive support is more frequent in more socioeconomically-advantaged people.
- Kin network size is not significantly related to socioeconomic position.
- Differences between wealthier and disadvantaged people were mainly found in the sorts of available resources, but not that much in the number of available alters.

Conclusions

- Higher average job prestige of alters is associated with better economic positions and lower risk of social exclusion (H1 confirmed), but achieved social capital is more important than inherited capital.
- Density of strong ties is very weakly related to economic deprivation (household equivalised net income) and slightly more related to social exclusion, but only if prestige is not accounted for in the models (H2 not confirmed).

More info in:

Miguel-Luken, V. de and García-Faroldi, L. (2021, in press). Two Sides of the Coin: The Link Between Relational Exclusion and Socioeconomic Exclusion, **Social Inclusion**, Special Issue “In Good Company? Personal Relationships, Network Embeddedness and Social Inclusion”, 9 (4).

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION